STINK AND THE CITY

It has been three weeks since Kathmandu’s garbage stopped being collected because of strikes at both the landfill site in Sisdole and the transfer station in Teku. A Rs 10 million deal was finally struck last week with Sisdole residents for the privilege of hosting the capital’s trash. But then Teku residents went on warpath, demanding the dump be shifted.

The city produces 350 tons of garbage daily, but 75 percent of it is biodegradable so it could easily be turned into valuable fertiliser if it was sorted. But there is good news. Dinesh Thapaliya at Kathmandu municipality says garbage collection will resume on Friday.

ANUP PRAKASH
Peace dividend?

The politicians are so busyickering, they have forgotten the people.

Asamese music teacher Meera Thapa was singing at a concert in Kathmandu last week when, in the middle of an old song by Tara Deb, someone in tears told her to stop singing. Meera Thapa is a third-generation Nepali, born in Digboi, educated in Shillong and mentored by a Nepali musicologist in Assam. Her Bengali is more fluent than her Nepali and she seldom comes to Nepal. Yet, while singing at Patel on Friday, when she got to the part where the lyrics go: ‘If there is a heaven on earth, it is my motherland...’ Meera Thapa could not control the emotions that welled up in her soul.

That may be, however much removed by time and distance from the land of our ancestors, there is a Nepali-ness that binds us. It is an emotional bond that is perhaps best expressed in poetry or song. Much more of a sense than the language, religion and festivals, beyond the artificial icons of nationhood, Mt Everest, Limbrini and the darje, or the even more distant monarchy, a togetherness that unites the Nepali world.

Meera Thapa’s tears signified a pure and intense emotional attachment to the land of her forefathers. What was remarkable was that this connection belonged seamlessly with the war.

Five Nepali migrant workers—a Madhesi, a Janajati, a Chehri, a Bahali and a Dalit—have jointly set up a literary society in the UAE that meets regularly for readings. The message in their poetry and song is always: why, if we are not at peace, then what is the point of our existence?

It is the tragedy of our times that the post-2006 identity politics is over-counting past injustices and taking us down the path of ethnocracy. While compensating for historic exclusion, we want to set right all kinds of wrongs in us. There is a danger the Madhes-Pahad gap will widen if the political tug-war in Kathmandu tempts the Maoists to project themselves as the protectors of the Pahad against those espousing a united Madhes. The Madhes needs autonomy, but not at the expense of other Tarai dwellers. Its ethnoseparatist slogans threaten our infant republic because it would set us apart for every grouping for an ‘unviable homeland’.

Let’s get into who came here first. Learn from countries in our region which have suffered decades of civil war. They were promised a ‘homeland’. While compensating for historic exclusion, we want to address differences among us?

Margaret Atwood, in her poem ‘Sin’, says: ‘We need a place to dream, but we will get there one day.’

The monarchy has been gone for more than a month and the people’s war ended two years ago, but there is no sign of the peace dividend. The country is still reeling without a head of state and run by a caretaker government two months after elections.

Guest Column
Bihari K Shrestha

Guest Column
Bihari K Shrestha

With scarcely any time left to produce next year’s fiscal budget, which were promised would reflect revolutionary change, the political parties continue to bicker. They have spent two precious months exchanging threats and mutual recriminations over what should have been a simple demotic, consensus-based decision-making. At issue are an agreement on how to form and dissolve the government, and the return of property seized by the Maoists, the demilitarisation of their CL and the merging of new and old districts into the regular army.

These two seem to have been sorted out, but in the meantime the foothold under the political parties has shifted. While the NC and UML initially worked together to get the Maoists to agree to these conditions, the UML is now increasingly aligned with the Maoists in a move to gain the support of the first president of Nepal.

Similarly, the IMF, the fourth largest country and largest in South Asia, with long-standing differences with the NC and UML at first, but now intent on holding up the agreement by demanding an autonomous Madhes even before a new constitution is written. It is being supported in this by the TMCP and the SP, who hotly dispute political rivalries.

There is a strong feeling of déjà vu in all this. Most of the conditions negotiated with the Maoists were agreed after the 1990-95dal, but the region only went downhill thereafter. During the subsequent 14 years of unfettered ‘democratic’ experiment, both corruption and warlordism flourished. They and UML relied ruthlessly to control the government, not helping the centre into opposition alliances with the leaders of the Paribachay regime they had ousted. The present situation is simply emasculating the self-serving nature of our politicians.

They, it is said, are more desperate for food, jobs, income, healthcare and education. They promised the Swiss during the elections, but now that the politicians are comfortably entrenched, these issues are being ignored in new ‘Development’ reports. Whatsoever sense of collective accountability that appeared at election time has vanished into thin air.

The donor community seems concerned. A stream of senior foreign officials and representatives have been visiting Kathmandu recently, obviously hoping that their presence and promises of funding will somehow help restore normalcy.

But, judging by the post-1990 era, the availability of easy money without policy and institutional reforms only fuels corruption. Surely donors must realise that those who have longed for a Nepali state longer than most other countries but continue to wallow in chronic poverty; ill-conceived aid does in fact more harm than good: it amounts to killing with kindness.

For there to be peace dividend, donors must insist on the empowerment of the people, with aid money going directly to the people.

Look at the success of the community forest projects. The World Bank in 1987 made user management of forests conditional for its $50 million Structural Adjustment Loan, thus forcing the government to devolve forestry legislation in 1988.

This did not cost the bank a single cent, but it made Nepal a model for policy and institutional protection and the user groups themselves became a significant counterweight to local traditionalism. The cardinal rule of responsible aid-giving should be to help Nepal devolve authority to its primary stakeholders.

Letters

C Rajendra, email

Health care

The reason doctors only serve in Kathmandu and not in remote areas (Nepali Times, July 12) is because the doctors have no choice. But blaming the doctors is everything in centralised so they have no choice. Of those few doctors serving in remote areas. Is their service rewarded appropriately by the government? Are they ever worked by the health ministry?

Puspa Pant, Aberdeen

Nepal has a multi-tier health system.

Rich patients go to Bangkok or India. The middle-class go to expensive clinicians and nursing homes in Kathmandu. The underprivileged queue up at government and teaching hospitals in Kathmandu and other cities. The poor go to local health centres in villages and district hospitals. And finally, there are the many who do not have access to any kind of healthcare system whatsoever.

As Mark Zimmerman says (Not just any doctor, #405) MDGPs can play a major leadership role at the district level, to improve health care. However, let us not forget that empowered within the vision of a 21st century healthcare delivery is the ever-growing need for specialists. Primary care at the health post is relevant. But it will be impossible to send cases to MDGPs at district level, selected cases to zonal specialist hospitals (radiology and cardiology in Kathmandu, Bharatpur for highly specialised care, eg neurosurgery, cardiac surgery, transplant surgery, interventional radiology, etc. For conditions needing long-term or life-long follow up, the continuity-of-care chain goes backward following the referral chain. For smooth referral, good telemedicine and information infrastructures—including air ambulance—are essential. I know I am dreaming, but we will get there one day. MDGPs is one place to start.

Jaspur, Edinburgh

* Doctors can be stimulated to work in the remote areas by giving them attractive salaries; remember that a Scottish organisation had to spend £100,000 to bring a Scottish GP to work in a small remote Scottish village.

Glen Mitrasingsh, Amsterdam

President

Madhav Kumar Nepal is the best choice for president. He is a simple man, his wife still works for a government bank and he has no political experience, but a remarkable memory. He is a member of the second largest party of the nation besides, he was the General Secretary of the Communist Party and the General Secretary of the second largest party of the nation. Surely donors must realise that those who have longed for a Nepali state longer than most other countries but continue to wallow in chronic poverty; ill-conceived aid does in fact more harm than good: it amounts to killing with kindness.

Rajesh Gautam, Puttal Sadak

Cyclocity

Kathmandu Valley would benefit most from a combination of low and high-fuel efficiency options: biogas-powered private motor vehicles and both bus and rail transit, bicycles and walking. (Cyclocity, #405) Effective mobility requires maintaining the compact, diverse and accessible urban planning and building that traditionally made cities economically and environmentally sustainable.

Stephen Coyle, email

I accept that the United Nations is necessary for Nepal’s peace process and development. But it is clear to see that the obscene salaries it pays its staff and the wastage of resources in driving around in huge glass-walled SUVs, one wonders if it could do more if it spent less on itself.

At a time when the whole world is reeling under a fuel crisis, the UN should set an example by reducing travel, using staff buses, bicycles, electric vehicles for delivery and generally cutting down on its carbon footprint.

C Rajendra, email

Letters

Nepali Times is printed by Himal Times Pvt Ltd and distributed in the Kathmandu Valley.


STATE OF THE STATE

C K Lal

Jaleswar—This town on Nepal’s southern edge hasn’t changed since the days when it was one of the biggest contributors to the national treasury. The Ranas named the local revenue office Bhaari Maal after the heavy load of silver coins it generated, to be transported by elephant to Birganj. From there, the taxes went either to pay for lavish palaces in Kathmandu or investments in Calcutta.

Bhaari Maal administered the very heartland of the Madhes. Its territory stretched from Kamala-Balan in the east to the Bagmati river. Moderate Madhesi are ignored, it is the military who will benefit.

If moderate Madhesi are ignored, it is the milita...
Nepal Times: How does the United States evaluate Nepal’s political transformation over the past two years, and in particular the post-election scenario?

Nancy Powell: The United States regards Nepal’s political transformation over the past two years as a state wracked by insurgency without a democratic government to its current situation of relative peace with a popularity elected Constituent Assembly and Parliament as a tremendous and very positive achievement for which all Nepalis should be proud. However, almost 12 weeks have passed since the April 10 elections. There is an urgent need for the political parties to find a way to establish a new government which can address the many pressing concerns of the country’s citizens, particularly the need for security through the rule of law. The Constituent Assembly needs to begin its important work of drafting a new constitution.

That being said, what pitfalls do you see ahead?

Nepal has made huge strides, but the country’s transformation is far from complete. The challenges of providing economic prosperity, truly participatory democracy, security, and lasting stability are enormous. Some of these challenges are the result of global issues such as the food crisis and petroleum prices, but others are due to deeply rooted domestic inequities and patterns which will be difficult to change. Nepal needs to figure out ways to attract foreign and domestic investment so it can begin to create the jobs its young population requires. It also needs to find a way to satisfy the understandable demands of the country’s many different groups while at the same time creating a national sense of identity that unifies all Nepalis.

Are you concerned at all that democratic values and press freedom may be threatened in the near future?

I am very concerned and have been meeting with government officials, civil society leaders, rural communities and other donors, they have not had an opportunity to benefit from meeting the new ministers. We plan to continue our collaboration with government, beneficiaries, and other partners as we implement future programs. The US provided more than $75 million in foreign aid to Nepal last year, which is the highest level of US foreign assistance funding allocated to Nepal in recent years. We expect our fiscal year 2008 budget to reach similar levels. In fact, our Congress just appropriated an additional $7 million in fiscal year 2008 funds for Nepal to support the democratic transition and promote economic growth. We plan to maintain our support for the implementation of the peace process and the transition to a more representative democracy and support the Nepal government’s plans to provide health services to all citizens.

But are there concerns about the new government’s commitment to the private sector, free market and FDI?

I firmly believe that only higher levels of inclusive growth can deliver lasting poverty reduction which will help to stabilise Nepal, and only the private sector can deliver that growth. The Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), which we expect to lead the new government, has expressed a commitment since the CA election to support the private sector, the free market and foreign direct investment, but its actions and those of its supporters will need to match that rhetoric. The government will play a very important role in creating the policy environment in which the economy can grow. We strongly hope that the new government will recognise that the private sector is by far the most powerful engine for economic growth.

On a slightly more personal note, people here have remarked on your lack of high-pitched campaign style in comparison with your predecessor. How much of a difference does the personality of the ambassador make in diplomacy?

When I arrived in August 2007, I noticed that Nepalis were speaking out with a great deal of courage and force to protect their rights and to move the country toward elections. I did not want to drown out those voices with mine and hope that I have successfully found other ways to express my support for their efforts.

“Only the private sector can deliver inclusive growth”

In an interview with Nepali Times this week, US Ambassador to Nepal Nancy Powell discusses the current political deadlock, the future of US development aid, the resettlement of refugees from Bhutan and threats to press freedom.

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That being said, what pitfalls do you see ahead?
This time round, farmers at the rice-planting ceremonies have been more enthusiastic, with more of them participating and people travelling back to their villages to ensure that their land does not remain uncultivated. The global rise in food prices has suddenly made agriculture seem like a lucrative business once more. Is that good news in a country where 80 per cent of the people depend on farming?

Food security has been a constant issue in this country’s history, and even today there are pockets of Nepal that face acute food shortages. One of the traditional ways of providing food security was through the guthi (trust communes), where land was owned by trusts whose members provided the labourers who did the work, and then shared the produce that was grown. As well as the trust members, the actual tillers of the land received a share of the harvest in return for their labour. The guthi system ensured the continuity of food security through the generations and steady reinvestment in the guthi through the purchase of extra land as the population increased. It would be interesting for economists to work out the price of rice that would be required for it to become more profitable to continue growing rice than to sell farm land for conversion to commercial or residential use. Agriculture productivity in Nepal has been among the lowest in South Asia. Rice productivity per hectare is way behind the regional average and the cost of production per hectare is also high. With about 5 million tonnes of rice being produced, if we could augment this by even 20 per cent that would bring an additional Rs 5 billion into the economy.

However, it is also important that quality does not suffer in the quest to raise productivity. Nepali markets are flooded with vegetables that are grown using chemical additives to speed up the growing process. While it is important to increase production, this should not mean flouting the law and creating severe health risks. With 601 members sitting in the Constituent Assembly, perhaps some of them could be spared to work on laws to regulate the quality of agricultural production.

While other countries have been busy setting up task forces to examine the impact of rising food prices—whether the social costs of the rising prices or the new economic opportunities that may result—we in Nepal are still busy looking for a president. The government needs to assess the immediate impact of the food price rises on salaries, and should be prepared for demonstrations by the labour unions, who never waste the chance to demand higher wages or shorter working hours. It should also expect protests from government employees, who find the value of their wages plummeting.

The budget is the right time for everyone to make noises. But Nepal, like some African and Central American countries, usually falls into the trap of finding short-term solutions without designing long-term policies in the agriculture sector. What Nepal needs is not heaps of documents like the Agriculture Perspective Plan that are relegated to shelves, but a prescriptive policy that will take care of production, productivity, pricing, and regulation without losing sight of the need for food security and related issues.
Dalit drama

The television series Dalan, which is broadcast every Sunday on Nepal Television, has managed to display Nepali society through Dalit eyes. It shows the political, social and cultural changes that took place from 1951 to 1995.

Set in the 1950s, the series is truly heart-warming. At a time when inter-caste marriage was almost unthinkable, Harihar, a Brahmin man, falls in love and weds Tulki, a Damini (a Dalit woman). When the villagers discover that he has married an untouchable, they shave his head and banish him from the village. Tulki gives birth to a new-born child, they agree to work as bonded labourers to Sher Bahadur, the landlord. With no money and a baby boy. They are helped by Dhammare Damai, who takes pity on them. With the political, social, and cultural changes that took place from 1951 to 1995.

However, the series, funded by the European Union and produced for Rs 6 million, has been smeared with dirt in the middle of the road. In the last three months there have been a number of accidents because cars get stuck on the slippery mud. The mud is being brought in from a housing complex built in Sitapaila and Hotel Annapurna. In spite of the locals requesting the vehicles responsible for the mud to dump it on the green belt at the road side, they are still dumping mud in the middle. The secretary of the Ward 16 office, Gobinda Acharya, is helpless. He says: “No one adheres to the orders that the ward office gives. This is really unfortunate.” The ward office cannot be able to do anything about this situation for the last three months. Banasthali police in charge Min Bahadur Khadka says that the police cannot interfere because it is not in their directives. “When the number of accidents increased, locals started working as vigilantes and the situation has been more under control since then,” says Khadka.

General Manager of the Roads Department Tulsi Sitaula says that the department is responsible for monitoring encroachment on the ring road but because of limited manpower they haven’t been able to do their work properly. He says that his department is aware of mud being piled up on the Banasthali stretch. “They pile the mud between 12 and 3 AM so it is extremely difficult to catch those responsible.” Sitaula says Hegye his assurance that the mud piles would be removed within the next two days. “But it’s more important to find the culprits who are responsible. We have already started an investigation and hope to find those responsible in a week or so.”

Bad education

While former king Gyanendra Shah has vowed to stay in the country, his only son, Paras Bikram Shah has packed his bags and flown to Singapore just 32 days after the monarchy was abolished. However, it seems that his schooling at posh schools in Darjeeling and Britain has not paid off very well. The embarrance card that Paras filled in at the airport was found, alarmingly, to have about 10 grammatical mistakes. The Nepali form was filled in English. Maybe because of the “psychological trauma” the present turn of events has caused him, Paras didn’t even spell his surname correctly. Shah has carelessly been spelled ‘Shah’.

Dirty business

Annupurna Post, 2 July

During the day the Balaju-Banasthali stretch of the ring Road is congested because of traffic jams. Almost the situation is worse because of the piles of mud in the middle of the road. In the last three months there have been anumber of accidents because cars get stuck on the slippery mud. The mud is being brought in from a housing complex built in Sitapaila and Hotel Annapurna. In spite of the locals requesting the vehicles responsible for the mud to dump it on the green belt at the road side, they are still dumping mud in the middle.

FROM THE NEPALI PRESS

Santosh Baraili in Himal Khabarpatra, 30 June-15 July
Although his date of birth has been filled in correctly, for some absurd reason Paras thought it important to write the month of his birth as ‘3 De’ in the space. The address too has only ‘Kath’. Furthermore, Paras was issued with a new ‘commoners’ green passport on 25 June 2008 and accordingly his passport would expire on 24 June 2018. But the former crown prince has written only ‘10’ in the space, perhaps referring to the number of years before it expires.

Paras’s spelling skills on the Interview with the former Chinese ambassador to Nepal, Li de Biao in Nepal, 6 July form are not that commendable either, with Singapore spelt ‘Singapur’. While it is well known that Paras is leaving the country for quite a long time, the form shows that he will be back after just 14 days. In addition, instead of the flight number MI 412, the name and number of the airline company have been filled in. The only things written in Nepali, the year and the month of his departure, are surprisingly correct. But the day has, again, been written in English. His signature is just a scrawl.

“Stop squabbling”

Interview with the former Chinese ambassador to Nepal, Li de Biao in Nepal, 6 July

With the end of the monarchy, China has lost an old friend in Nepal. In the future, who will be China’s friend?

The relationship between China and Nepal is very strong. Regardless of the changes in Nepal, the Chinese policy towards Nepal will always remain the same. Whoever the Nepali people choose and want to be led by will be China’s friend.

But China made no efforts to save its old friend. China never interferes in the internal matters of other countries. We respect the decision made by the Nepalis.

If the Free Tibet Movement becomes stronger in Kathmandu, what will you do?

We are aware of it. India and the west have supported the Dalai Lama and thus increased the problems. In the present political situation in Nepal, the so-called Tibet freedom movement has gained momentum. This has been China’s problem for a long time.

But Nepal has always treated Tibet as part of China. The Nepal government should take a strong stance against the Free Tibet movement in Nepal.

As a Chinese diplomat, what is your advice to Nepal?

Relations between Nepal and China will still be centred on the security of the two nations. But the main necessity for Nepal is economic development and prosperity. China can help Nepal with that. Now it is not the time for political squabbles, the political leaders need to focus on economic development. I was the Chinese ambassador to Nepal during Jana Andolan I. Even then my suggestion was the same to the political leaders. There are still differences amongst the leaders on economic development.

How can China help Nepal in its economic development?

I have been discussing with China’s Chambers of Commerce and other big industrialists how China can contribute to Nepal’s economic development. In the near future, I will visit Nepal with a group of industrial representatives. A lot of Chinese industrialists are interested in investing in Nepal.

“This is already a Madhya Pradesh, just take a look at the map.”

Upendra Yadav and Hridayesh Tripathi: One Madhes, One Pradesh!

“There is already a Madhya Pradesh, just take a look at the map.”
Early 250 years ago, this was the road to defeat for Captain Kinloch as his East India Company troops were crushed by Gorkhali soldiers near Sindhuli Gadhi. Today, other foreigners—this time the Japanese—have created a magnificent new highway that sweeps past the now crumbling fort.

With Prithbi Narayan Shah breathing down his neck in 1767, a desperate Jayaprakash Malla, the king of Kantipur, had sent an SOS to the East India Company in Bettiah, asking to be rescued. Kinloch was despatched with 2,400 soldiers and approached through Sindhuli, heading for Panauti and the most direct route into the Kathmandu valley. However, not there; a legend has it, his army was defeated by a simple hornet's nest, hurled from PauwaGadi by a handful of wily Gorkhali soldiers.

Were a similar invasion launched today, the soldiers would find themselves cruising up a smooth mountain highway from the plains. The road is built to Japanese specifications, with massive retaining walls, culverts and drainage channels. The only problem, say bus and truck drivers, is that the gradients are too steep in places and the road is too narrow.

Under construction for the past 12 years, the 158km highway is now nearing completion. Winding from Dhulikhel down to Bardibas, it will reduce travel times for people journeying east from the capital by up to eight hours. At present, a bus from Kathmandu to Biratnagar first has to make a 200km detour west to Mugling and back.

The stretch of road from Sindhuli Bajar to Sindhuli Gadhi was completed a couple of years ago and, because it has not seen much traffic, it still looks pristine. The grass on the verges, free of the garbage that normally litters Nepali roads, appears almost manicured.

At SolaBhanjyang, a path clammers up the hillside from the road to reach the old ruined

The Sindhuli Highway is not just a new shortcut to eastern Nepal, it takes us back into history.
A long and winding road

Construction of the Dhulikhel-Sindhuli-Bardibas road started in November 1996, funded by a grant from the Japanese government.

When completed, the 158km road will provide the most direct route between Kathmandu and the eastern Terai, linking Dhulikhel on the Arniko Highway with Bardibas on the East-West Highway, and reducing the distance from Bardibas to the capital by 200km.

The first section, the 33km from Bardibas to Sindhuli Bajar, was finished in March 1998 and is soon to traffic, with 26km tarmacked and 7km on gravel. In January 2003 work began on the second part, the 33km from Sindhuli Bajar to Khurkot. All except 10km of this section has been finished. The 50km stretch between Dhulikhel and Nepalathok has also been finished, but work on the final section, the 33km from Khurkot to Nepalathok, has not yet begun although a rough track has been opened.

Shiva Ghimire, the senior project engineer, says the road may not be convenient for heavy trucks as it is only 5.5m wide and is intended for light vehicles. He says it had to be designed this way because of the difficult terrain and lack of funds. Work on the road was delayed two years by the conflict.

Fort Sindhuli. For such a historic site, it is in a sad state of neglect. Nature is beginning to lay claim to the old walls, and the nearby palace is a solid, barely a shadow of its former elegance as immortalised by the late Krishna Bikram Thapa in the song “Sindhuli ghuthi ghumera herda, sunalimai, katti ko ramro darbara…”

When the highway is finished, probably in the autumn, Sola Bhanjyang will be an exciting and easy 80km from Dhulikhel. For such a historic site, it is in a sad state of neglect. Nature is beginning to lay claim to the old walls, and the nearby palace is a solid shell, barely a shadow of its former elegance as immortalised by the late Krishna Bikram Thapa in the song “Sindhuli ghuthi ghumera herda, sunalimai, katti ko ramro darbara…”

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Cooperative federalism

T he Constituent Assembly needs to begin immediately discussions on the governance structure essential for guiding the future trajectory of new Nepal. There are two models being proposed by political parties. The Maoists have proposed dividing Nepal into 12 ethnic enclaves, whereas the Madhes-based parties have emphasised creating a single Tarai autonomous state. The NC, UML and other major parties do not have any specific proposals of their own, but have shown their reservations for both forms of federal structure. Other groups in the Tarai (Churebhar and Tharus) are opposed to the idea of a single Tarai state.

These two competing models are mostly driven by cultural sentiments. For example, by ignoring the ecological interdependence of the three geographical belts—mountains, hills and plains—and dividing them into three long strips of separate states, there is less chance of providing a long-lasting solution. Advocates of this proposal, comprising a 1,000km-long strip of land bordering five Indian states is not going to be very practical for a land-locked country like Nepal with its distinctly interconnected ecological belts. Likewise, the smaller, fragmented, ethnic enclaves proposed by the Maoists without any umbrella structure and/or central supervision could be detrimental to the unity of the country.

A much more workable model would be a cooperative federal structure with four states based on our rich river basins—Karnali, Gandaki, Koshi—and with a four-tier administrative system: centre, state, region and villages (see map).

Under this proposal, each federal state could have three to four ethnic enclaves known as regions, along the lines of the Maoists’ proposed ethnic structure. These regions will send their representatives, based on their population, to form the State Legislative Assembly under a directly elected Governorship. These ethnic enclaves can enjoy some forms of carefully crafted socio-economic and cultural autonomy (schooling, language rights and cultural practices) without jeopardising the ethnic harmony and the territorial integrity of the nation.

Most Nepalis face the same problems and share the same aspirations. A political solution that is also viable economically would provide a lasting solution for problems we face today. The time has come for people to look to the north and see the vast potential of the interdependent ecological belts. Likewise, the smaller, fragmented, land-locked country like Nepal with its three distinctly bordering five Indian states is not going to be very practical for a north-south federated structure with four states based on our rich river basins—Karnali, Gandaki, Kosi—with a four-tier administrative system: centre, state, region and villages (see map).

Karnali
Gandaki
Kosi
Kathmandu

A workable political-economy approach for a New Nepal

No longer can three Pahadi Bahun men sit in Baluwatar and decide for the rest of the country.

T his section does not see any advantage in cosying up to their main rival, the NC, because is a sinking ship and is conservative on federalism. Instead, a tactical relationship with the Maoists makes more sense.

And then you have the other players who have limited stakes but are keen to make their presence felt. Mahato’s Sadbhavana was furious with Koirala for unfairly giving the one seat allotted to them in the 26-seat quota to Shyam Sunder Bahun men in Baluwatar and decide for the rest of the country.

A taste of Italy

B ond with the samosa at the Goody Restaurant has been good. The Goody Restaurant at the Hyatt Regency has launched a menu called Goody Restaurant, with new risotto and gnocchi “specials”, available until 20 July, which have sour chef Dawn Ama’says will offer a “unique pasta flavour to the Nepali people”. These additions to the usual menu, it must be said, are simply delicious, offering customers a whole new taste of Italian food. But the rustic pasta dishes and plain old pizza. Then, risottos, cooked with the deliciously soft, plump and sticky porcini mushrooms, with porcini mushrooms. And then you have the other players who have limited stakes but are keen to make their presence felt. Mahato’s Sadbhavana was furious with Koirala for unfairly giving the one seat allotted to them in the 26-seat quota to Shyam Sunder Bahun men in Baluwatar and decide for the rest of the country.

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A taste of Italy

In addition, the new constitution needs to be very specific about which powers go to the federal units. If the new federal system does end up based on language and/or ethnicity, it seems reasonable to devolve school-level education to the sub-national regional entities, whereas the federal-level government can focus on the autonomous university system and hydropower development. Perhaps we could also consider health care and some justice issues.

However, care needs to be taken with taxation. Though we know this to be the norm in most federal systems, the fundamental inequality in Nepali society is going to make this a very important and potentially explosive issue. While devolution sounds great, we are still going to have to have a strong central government to even things out.

Alok Bohara, PhD, is professor at the University of New Mexico. For a longer version of this proposal, see: bohara@unnm.edu
the Madhes

addressed within the CA framework. Once the CA is not needed for such a constitutional guarantee, there was no need for the other parties to make such a big deal and drag it for so long. They should have been more willing and prompt, to give a firmer commitment to a previously signed agreement, demanding an auratized Madhes in this amendment. But there was an orchestrated attempt by the UML, its loyalist civil society and sections of the media, to portray it that way to show Madhes groups are unreasonable.

Samagra Madhes is a future battle, not the issue right now. The UML’s move exposed it for what it is an instrument of power and a tool to smother Madhes nationalism. Bahkhu may seem important in the numbers game right now, but their expected marginalisation from Nepali politics is good news for the Madhes.

In Nepal’s polarised politics, the Madhes card will tilt the game. Whether it goes along with the other actors is impossible to predict. What is certain is that it is the way to climb higher in Kathmandu.

The assembly is meant to write a new constitution, not to amend the interim constitution. In that sense, the demand for incorporating Madhes-related clauses means little in specific terms. But for many Madhes leaders, this was a test case to see if their demands would be

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Monsoon sky

July is when the monsoon peaks in Nepal and the night sky is generally obscured by cloud. But remember—when the sky becomes clear again, you will be rewarded with very sharp images of the stars and planets because of the increased moisture in the atmosphere.

This month we have a meteor shower, the Earth reaches its most distant position from the Sun, and we have some great views of the planets. But first, let’s make sure you know your way around the sky.

In the northern-west skies the Big Dipper (Saptarshi) is still visible, and you should be able by now to use two of its stars, Menak and Dubhe, as pointers to help you find Polaris, almost at the north celestial pole.

Do you notice three bright stars—Vega, Deneb and Altair—forming a triangle on the eastern horizon? This is the great Summer Triangle that signals the arrival of summer and will dominate the night sky for several months, so take some time to become familiar with it. Just below the Summer Triangle you will notice the zodiacal constellation of Sagittarius (the Archer), where you will find Jupiter, the king of the planets.

West of Sagittarius, you should easily be able to identify other zodiacal constellations, namely Scorpius (the Scorpion), Libra (the Scales), Virgo (the Virgin) and Leo (the Lion).

On 6 July, watch Mars, Saturn and the Moon get together.

On 4 July the Earth reaches the aphelion—the position in its orbit where it is farthest from the Sun. We are then about three per cent further from the Sun than we are at the closest point, the perihelion, reached in early January. Most people are surprised to learn that our planet is farthest from the Sun in midsummer! Note that the seasons are caused by the tilt of the Earth, not by the distance between the Sun and Earth.

Of the other planets, Mercury is at its greatest elongation west of the Sun on 1 July, when it will rise in the north-east about an hour before the Sun. It won’t be easy to see this planet in the dawn sky, and by the end of the month it will be hidden behind the Sun.

Venus is now starting to emerge from behind the Sun, but it is still a very shy “evening star”, setting in the west only half an hour after the Sun.

Mars, in Leo, is still visible this month, low in the west immediately after sunset. Saturn will be very close to Mars and significantly brighter. On the evening of 6 July, don’t miss the chance to see the meeting of Mars, Saturn and the crescent Moon just below the “heel” of Leo (see star chart). The giant planet Jupiter is at opposition to the Sun on 9 July, when it will be appearing in the south-east at dusk and setting in the south-west at dawn.

Meteors watchers should prepare for the Southern Delta Aquarids, a meteor shower which peaks on 23 July. If you happen to be outside after midnight on or around that date, you might see some meteors in the southern sky. If you miss them, don’t worry, because in mid-August we will have the Perseids, the best meteor shower of the year!

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kedarbadu(at)gmail.com

Vacancy Announcement

WWF, the global conservation organisation leading international efforts for a living planet, seeks applications for qualified candidates for the following position.

LEADER, LIVING HIMALAYAS NETWORK INITIATIVE.

This initiative will focus on transformational strategies that transcend political boundaries by bringing governments, NGOs, donor agencies and local communities together to ensure large-scale protection and connectivity of habitats, tackle the principal threats to the region such as climate change, wildlife crime, illegal wildlife trade, strengthen key industries to minimise their negative environmental impacts and respond to the potentially devastating impacts of climate change in the Eastern Himalayas.

The Leader will provide dynamic leadership to ensure a high profile for the work and to support delivery on the challenging objectives. Specific responsibilities will include: leading the development of the Strategic Plan; leading coordination of the Initiative, focusing on the delivery of the regional strategies; managing a small Core Team and working in tandem with the awil WWF Sherpani Karka Group to establish the operational framework of the Initiative; formulate budgets and ensure funds and build strategic partnerships.

Applications must have a successful track record in developing strategics and implementing complex large-scale programmes; excellent cross-cultural and people skills; and successful relationship management experience. The applicant must possess: advanced degree or equivalent work experience in environmental, forest conservation or environmental development with at least 10 years professional experience, as well as, fluency in English. She must be willing and able to undertake regular travel in difficult conditions.

A positive personality with an ability to constructively motivate, coordinate and lead a team, an ability to think laterally and strategically, extensive field experience in the Eastern Himalayas and a sound understanding of the socio-cultural milieu would be a distinct advantage.

The position will be based in Nepal.

Interested candidates should mail a cover letter and CV to the following address or email to: recruitment@wfn.org

Application deadline: Friday 25 June 2008

Himalayan Resources:

WWF International

1199, Blaisd, Switzerland

Tel: +43 22 394 9111
Fax: +43 223 394 7855

kedarbadu(at)gmail.com

For further information on this position, please check the job description on our website at http://www.panda.org/jobs or at www.wfnepal.org

STARGAZING

Kedar S Badu

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Football is war

But Euro 2008 saw more harmony between rival fans than ever before

AMSTERDAM—The late Arthur Koestler, born in Budapest, resident of many countries, and writer in several languages, once said that there is nationalism, and there is football nationalism. The feelings inspired by the latter are by far the stronger.

Koestler himself, a proud and loyal British citizen, remained a lifelong Hungarian soccer nationalist.

For several weeks this summer, the stadiums in Austria and Switzerland, not to mention the streets of European capitals, from Madrid to Moscow, were given an orgy of flag-waving, anthem-singing, drum-beating nationalism. Spain's victory was an explosion of patriotic delight. Andalusians erupted together in one of the rare occasions that patriotism. Spain's victory was anthem-singing, drum-beating given to an orgy of flag-waving, from Madrid to Moscow, were the streets of European capitals, and Switzerland, not to mention summer, the stadiums in Austria nationalistic.

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VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

Support to Participatory Constitution Building in Nepal - UNDP

The Support to Participatory Constitution Building in Nepal supports civil society organizations, political parties, and the private sector in Nepal to engage in the process of building a new constitution. The program aims to strengthen participation, promote inclusive dialogue, and ensure that the new constitution reflects the aspirations of all segments of society.

Position: Translator/Interpreter (4) - SF 50

Job Description:

- Assist in the translation of materials related to the project, including reports, presentations, and letters.
- Ensure the accuracy and clarity of the translated materials.
- Maintain confidentiality of project-related information.

Responsibilities:

- Translate and interpret materials related to the project into English and Nepali.
- Assist in the planning and execution of project activities.
- Support the facilitation of workshops and meetings.
- Ensure the smooth functioning of all activities related to the project.

Requirements:

- Bachelor's degree in translation or related field.
- Proficiency in English and Nepali.
- Excellent writing and communication skills.

Qualifications:

- Strong technical knowledge and understanding of the project's field of work.
- Experience in translation and interpretation.
- Excellent team player.

Application Procedure:

Interested candidates should submit their applications to the UNDP office in Kathmandu, Nepal. The deadline for applications is 30 June 2023. Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted for an interview.
EXHIBITIONS
- Nepalscapes exhibition of paintings by Jolanda Ascott and Gunnar Ray, until 9 July at Siddhartha Art Gallery, Babar Mahal Revisited, Kathmandu 11AM-6PM. 4218048
- Absence of Objects exhibition of paintings by Sanj Kushwaha, until 15 July at 5.30 PM, Park Gallery, Pulchok, 5263007
- Tattva multimedia and collage exhibition by Chirag Bangdel until 19 July. 5.30 PM at Bakery Cafe, Pulchok.
- Connection solo charity art exhibition by Juju Kaji Maharjan. 6 July-6 August. 2PM at 1905 Restaurant, Kantipath, 9851050299

EVENTS
- Charlie Wilson’s War a film starring Tom Hanks, at Lazimpat Gallery Cafe. 8 July. 6:30 PM, 4423549
- Silence of Bardiya, wildlife conservation play by Aratoan Gurung, 18 July (except Mondays), 5:30 PM at Ralim Theatre, Guthku. 4482956
- Change fundraiser concert with performances by Kumbha and others at Ralim Hall, Guthukul. 12 July. 985103477

MUSIC
- Live jazz at Hyla Jazz club, Hyatt Regency, Kathmandu. 8.30 PM onwards. 486800
- Make Monsoon Music Jazzabell Cafe every Wednesday and Friday 6:30-10:30 PM. 20 per cent discount on all drinks between 6-7PM. Live Music Jam Sessions every Wednesday and Friday
- Live karaoke with special Thai cuisine, every Wednesday at Holiday Karaoke Restaurant and Bar, Lazimpat. 4447371
- Rudra night fusion and classical Nepali music by Shyam Nepali and friends, every Friday, 7PM at Le Meridien, Gokarna. 4451212
- Sufi music by Hemanta Rana, every Friday at 7.30 PM at Dhaba Restaurant and Bar, Thapathali.

DINING
- Risotto and gnocchi at the Ralx Restaurant, Hyatt regency, Kathmandu, till 20 July from 7-10.30PM
- Continental and Cafe item with a live band every Friday at Vintage Cafe and Pub, Woodland complex, Durbarmarg
- The Fun Cafe, discounts available 12.30-2.30PM and 6:30-10:30 PM at Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu , Rs. 800 till 31 July, 441818
- Sixth Annual Wine Festival until September at Kikyo’s, Jyatha. 5255440
- Thakali and local cuisine at Mrpha Thakali Restaurant and Bar, Teku. 4454504
- Lajumab tandoori and kabad festival, 7-10 PM every Friday at the Hotel Himalaya, Rs 550.

- Japanese lunch set, Rs 445 at Shugun, Japanese restaurant, Babar Mahal Revised. 4263728
- Home made pasta at Al fresco, Soaltee Crowne Plaza. 4273999
- The Kaiser Cafe open now at the Garden of Dreams, operated by Dwarika’s Group of Hotels, open from 9AM-10PM. 4425341
- Mango elagious mango delicacies 4.30-6.30 PM at the Lounge, Hyatt Regency. 4491834
- Steak escape with Kathmandu’s premier steaks at the Olive Bar and Bistro, Hotel Radisson. 441818
- Bourbon Room Restro-bar now open for lunch and dinner with over a 100 cocktails, Lal Darbar.
- Cocktails and grooves with jazz by Inner Grove at Fusion-the bar at Dwarika’s every Wednesday, at Dwarika’s Hotel.
- Cocktails, mocktails and liqueurs at the Asshi Lounge, opening hour 11:30 AM – 11:30 PM, above Himalayan Java, Thamel.
- Illy espresso coffee at the Galleria cafe, every Friday espresso cocktails.

International buffet at the Sunrise Cafe, and specialities at Chimney, Hotel Yak and Yeti. 4248999

- Jazz in Patan with coffee, food, drinks and dessert at the New Orleans Cafe, Jawalakhel. 8.30 AM-1PM. 5222708
- Scrumptious wood fired pizzas, cocktails and more at Roadhouse, Sitalenati 4426597, Pubchok 5521755 and Thamel 4261187.
- Retro Brunch Barbeque with live acoustic music by Sound Chemistry, every Saturday, 12-3PM at LeMeridien-Kathmandu, Gokarna. 4451212
- Dhamaka a Nepali style barbeque with a pan-Indian fusion at the Spicy Bar and Grill, Hotel Radisson, 7PM, every Friday. 441818
- Starry night barbecue at Hotel Shangri-la with Live performance by Cinay Gurung, Rs. 666.00 at the Shanmala Garden, every Friday 7PM onwards. 4423999
- Kebabs and curries at the Dhaba, Thapathali. 9841290619
- Lavazza coffee Italy’s favourite coffee at La Dolce Vita, Thamel, Roadhouse Cafe Pubchok and Thamel. 4700612
- Frappe the best coffee in town at Jal Thamel. 4425191

For inclusion in the listing send information to editors@nepalitimes.com
**HAPPENINGS**

**FINGER OF FUDGE:** Prime Minister Koirala speaks at the inauguration of the new Rotary International District for Nepal on Tuesday.

**HEAVY METAL:** The gold plating of Swoyambhu Stupa, expected to be finished in two years, started on Tuesday with donations worth Rs 41 million from the Californian-based Ningma Meditation Centre.

**CONVENTIONAL WISDOM:** Activists of the human rights group Insec organise a signature campaign to pressure the government to accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, at Maitighar Mandala on Tuesday.

**UMBRELLA ORGANISATION:** Landless people, living on the banks of Kathmandu’s Bagmati and Bishnumati rivers, stage a protest at the Maitighar Mandala on Wednesday, demanding settlement and sanitation in slum areas.
The thing to do with the current garbage crisis is to keep a positive mental attitude as you are knocked unconscious by the stench of rubbish in the capital of our glorious new republic. For example, it is now much easier to give directions to people to my house. (“Get off the micro at Pulchok, turn left at the big black bull sitting in the middle of the road, walk uphill, let your nose guide you to the neighbourhood dump, and the Ass’s abode is the third gate on the right. If you see another garbage pile that is causing a monstrous traffic jam because it is completely blocking the road, then you have gone too far.”) This is probably the only city in the world where garbage causes traffic jams.

Nepal Tourism Board, always on the lookout for new ways to boost visitor arrivals now that Tibet is closed, should make the best of the situation and come up with trashy slogans like: ‘Why Go To Naples When You Can Go To Nepal?’, ‘Federal Democratic Republic of Rubbish’, ‘Watch Us Consigning Ourselves To The Garbage Heap of History’, ‘Come Rot With Us’.

While the YCL is now starting to transfer garbage from one neighbourhood of the city to other neighbourhoods as part of its transformation from the Red Guards into a Gandhian NGO, guess who is taking over from the YCL? The UML’s own Youth Force (Motto: If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em) is using the YCL modus operandi of vigilante justice and deploying goons to make showcase sting operations in front of TV cameras. The media is lapping up this ready-made drama because producers have realised it is the cheapest way to fill the airtime.

However, Comrade JN is reportedly coming under a lot of flak from within his party and donors about his new street gang. In one meeting on Wednesday, he tried to completely disown the Youth Force but it wasn’t very convincing because Jhallubabu himself publicly tied red bandanas on the ‘Hormone Hoodlums’ at a ceremony in Koteswor two weeks ago. Not to be outdone, the kangresi Tarun Dal is thinking of forming its own Adolescent Army.

It now transpires that JN was too much of an eager beaver in prematurely endorsing Kamred Makunay for president. He had thought this would neatly sideline his rival for party leader, but now looks like Prachanda took Jhallu for a ride, like he did the Madhesis and the kangresis with his carrot and stick approach.

With a new candidate emerging every hour, tables are turning again in the presidential race. GPK is reportedly back in the ring after an earlier KO—not because Girjau wants it but because His Fierceness wants it. Yes, the choice of prez is stuck not because of competing claims by the Big Four but because of internal divisions within the Maoists.

Here is the state of play in a nutshell: Mohan Baidya wants Sahana, Fearsome wanted Makunay but wouldn’t mind Ram Raja or Giri-raja but is hesitating because he doesn’t want to be sworn in by GPK, Baburam wants PKD as prez so he can be executive prime minister, the army wants neither PKD nor GPK, JN wants MKN but only to prevent Sahana while some sections of the UML want Nembang, Pahariya is swatting Kamal Nepal for president. And GPK wants GPK. All clear?

How come the Brits are so keen on PLA integration? A junket they’d organised in Pat Pong for this week has been postponed because only retired jaraps, govt guys and ex-guerrillas agreed to go. Field Marshal Girija also put his foot down and reportedly asked the Brits if they had inducted the RA into their own army. If they were so keen, the British Army could integrate the Maoists into the Gurkha Rifles and deploy them in Helmand Province.

Entries to the New Name contest to: ass(at)nepalitimes.com